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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN OMAN AND AFGHANISTAN:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Special Operations Forces During the Dhofar Insurgency and in Afghanistan: A Comparative Study for German Special Operations Forces

**Author:** Lieutenant Colonel Karsten Kraemer, German Army

**Thesis:** A revision of structures and procedures at the strategic, operational and tactical levels is necessary to enhance transparency and efficiency of German special operations forces (SOF).

**Discussion:** German SOF have been operating in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2002. A controversial discussion about the transparency and control of German SOF was triggered by the events on 4 September 2009 when a NATO air strike at Kunduz, in response to a request by German forces, killed scores of Afghan civilians. Although the air strike was not the specific consequence of German SOF involvement, the strike dominated political debates in Germany for several months and in November 2009 led to the resignation of German labor minister Franz Josef Jung, who was defense minister during the attack. During the debates that followed, the German SOF role in Afghanistan was questioned.

With the above in mind, the British SOF experience in Oman during the 1970s can serve as a useful model for the future of German SOF in Afghanistan. In that regard, this paper seeks to answer the following question: Is the British concept of integrating SOF in a counterinsurgency campaign as conducted in Oman between 1970 and 1976 applicable to German SOF operating in Afghanistan and beyond? The implications of the answer are significant given that the primary mission of British SOF in Oman was Military Assistance, also the primary mission for ISAF SOF in Afghanistan.

**Conclusion:** As demonstrated by the British experience in Oman during the Dhofar insurgency, Military Assistance is a viable mission for German SOF in Afghanistan. As such, German SOF will require greater flexibility in terms of outlook and mission given the need to closely integrate German SOF with indigenous forces. Therefore, ongoing “force-restructuring” discussions in Germany must include the need to modify German SOF with regard to roles and missions.

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## **Introduction and Research Methodology**

Germany's Special Operations Forces (SOF) have been operating in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2002. A controversial discussion about the transparency and control of German SOF was triggered by the events on 4 September 2009 when a NATO air strike at Kunduz, in response to a request by German forces, killed scores of Afghan civilians. Although the air strike was not the specific consequence of German SOF involvement, the strike dominated political debates in Germany for several months and in November 2009 led to the resignation of German labor minister Franz Josef Jung, who was defense minister during the attack. During the debates that followed, the German SOF role in Afghanistan was questioned. However, debate and criticisms have always accompanied the German SOF mission in Afghanistan. The 'Kurnaz' case in 2005 has also led to a defense committee investigation into the matter of transparency of special operations.<sup>1</sup> A revision of structures and procedures at the strategic, operational and tactical level is therefore necessary to enhance transparency and efficiency of German SOF.

With the above in mind, the British SOF experience in Oman during the 1970s can serve as a useful model for the future of German SOF in Afghanistan. In that regard, this paper seeks to answer the following question: Is the British concept of integrating SOF in a counterinsurgency campaign as conducted in Oman between 1970 and 1976 applicable to German SOF operating in Afghanistan and beyond? The implications of the answer are significant given that the primary mission of British SOF in Oman was Military Assistance, also the primary mission for ISAF SOF in Afghanistan.

Great Britain decided in the 1960s to support the Sultanate of Oman in countering an insurgency in the Dhofar region. As Tony Jeapes pointed out: "*The Dhofar war was a model campaign. Yet one of the most successful counter-insurgency campaigns of modern years...*"<sup>2</sup> British Special Operations Forces were integrated in the British Oman Campaign between 1970

and 1976. These Special Operations forces enabled success in this counterinsurgency campaign. Their primary mission was Military Assistance which is also the primary mission for ISAF SOF in Afghanistan, like the German SOF.

After explaining the analytical framework, a historical analysis of the UK SOF Oman campaign will be conducted based on this framework. After a brief description of the Afghanistan ISAF campaign a framework based analysis of ISAF SOF with focus on German SOF will follow. Only unclassified documents will be used in order to describe this approach. The comparison of the two different approaches will deliver conclusions for German SOF in Afghanistan and beyond.

### **The Analytical Framework**

Basilici and Metz developed a framework specifically designed to analyze Unconventional Warfare Missions of SOF in a Counterinsurgency.<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses on Military assistance in a broader sense and specifically on Foreign Internal defense in Oman and Afghanistan. Military Assistance integrates Unconventional Warfare and Foreign Internal Defense. Within the context of this paper Unconventional Warfare (UW) will be defined ‘as a military support of a just campaign against an unjust government’. Instead of Foreign Internal Defense (FID) which will be defined as a ‘military support to a just government against an unjust campaign conducted by insurgents’. Both, UW and FID are within an insurgency/counterinsurgency environment. Insurgency and Counterinsurgency are in a population oriented perspective a choice between alternatives, eg. the existing government or the shadow government – the insurgents. In this choice between alternatives the support and supporting relationship between the assisting forces and the assisted government or insurgent requires additional attention. Understanding Insurgency and Counterinsurgency as a struggle between two alternatives, the importance for the assisting force is comparatively challenging. Therefore the UW principles of Overlapping Objectives,

Decontrol, Restraint, Perseverance, and Fostering Legitimacy are adaptable to analyze a FID mission.

The principle of Overlapping Objectives describes the importance of congruent political objectives between the assisted and the assisting government. Translating these political objectives into military strategic, operational, and tactical objectives is no less paramount in a Military Assistance mission. The decreased operational reach of an assisted government in a counterinsurgency requires the careful adaptation of these political objectives to local powerbrokers' objectives which are not necessarily congruent to a host nation's government's objectives. The requirement of a detailed top-down derivation of objectives is necessary. In equal importance is the bottom up development of military objectives into political objectives. Military objectives should not outpace political, economical or informational objectives. A balanced development is necessary in spite of the potential danger of creating a security monopoly or power vacuum.<sup>4</sup>

The principle of Decontrol characterizes an essential prerequisite for successful command and control in a MA mission. Successful Command and Control ensures unity of effort without bureaucratically comprising the subordinate forces. The correlation between risk averseness of political and military decision makers and bureaucratically compromise is evident. Besides this "Command Philosophy" the hierarchical stretch and structure are equally important. Additional levels and echelons require additional information, which may increase information production at the lowest levels. And secondly time and intense planning considerations are not inherited in a military culture of indigenous forces in which initiative and swift decisions characterizes decision making processes. Therefore the tactical dependence between the assisted and the assisting forces requires flexibility at the lowest tactical level.

The principle of Restraint points out the importance of the discreet application of firepower. It

is build upon the observation that “Excessive force antagonizes those parties involved, thereby damaging the legitimacy of the organization that uses it while possibly enhancing the legitimacy of the opposing party”<sup>5</sup>

The principle of Perseverance is best understood with a thought from late President Nixon: “When a president sends American troops to war, a hidden timer starts to run. He has a finite time to win the war before the people grow weary of it.”<sup>6</sup> MA takes month or even years to achieve an intended objective. Decision makers must remember that success is time intensive; however it is also long lasting. Once a host nation’s or indigenous force is trained and educated it is still effective, when the assisting force has left the area of operation.

The principle of Fostering Legitimacy is perhaps the most important principle in this framework. Legitimacy is the focal point of any insurgency and counterinsurgency. Integrity<sup>7</sup> of a host nation’s government and its subsequent political and military decision makers is a prerequisite, as well as disciplined forces conducting the counter insurgent purpose. Legitimacy of host nation’ executive elements have to be constructed in the eyes of the population. “You cannot win the war, without the help of the population, and you cannot get the support of the population, with at least beginning to win the war,”<sup>8</sup> best describes the requirement for legitimate forces, which have to be effective besides being disciplined and integer. If operating in a culture where Tribal societies possess cultural dominance this principle is even more relevant. Tribal societies respect only a powerful force that is able to establish security as their legitimate executive force. That requires forces which are able to strike hard and precise when the necessity occurs.

### **British SOF in Oman**

#### **Historical Background**

The Sultanate of Oman has been a British protectorate since the 1870s.<sup>9</sup> It consists of two

distinct territories: Muscat and Oman. Inside Oman, Dhofar is a fertile coastal region which incorporates a mountainous interior “the Green Mountain,” Jebel Akhdar. This mountain creates an ideal terrain for insurgent activity.<sup>10</sup>

The U.K.’s Oman campaign in the 1970s, was a small sized engagement to deny communist influence in the Sultanate of Oman. The British addressed this necessity after their forces were forced to withdraw from neighboring Southern Yemen in 1967. A revolutionary government took power in Southern Yemen, which was committed to liberate the Gulf from “British control”. The 1970’s Oman Campaign was the second time British SOF were engaged in the Sultanate of Oman.<sup>11</sup>

Both missions in the Sultanate of Oman were conducted under the influence of decolonization. British colonies were carefully transitioned into sovereignty, which often required the use of military force to combat anti British insurrections, most commonly Communist or Maoist inspired insurrections in Malaya (1950) and Oman (1958 and 1970). The British strategic objective was the creation of a sovereign state, which after decolonization still respected British economical and diplomatic influence.

“*If you are out walking and meet a Dhofari and a snake, tread on the Dhofari,*” was Sultan Qaboos father’s response when interviewed by a British journalist about the conditions in the Dhofar.<sup>12</sup> The old Sultan’s dislike of the Dhofaris supported the breeding ground for the revolutionary Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) which was founded in 1962. Later the DLF developed into the People’s Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) with support from the new People’s Republic of Southern Yemen<sup>13</sup>. Now, the local insurgency of Dhofar grew into a national threat to Oman and to the British relationships in the Gulf Region.<sup>14</sup>

British support, which was initially rejected by the old Sultan, was granted access after a successful coup d’etat of the Sultan’s eldest Son Qaboos,. The new Sultan stood up the

international Dhofar Brigade in order to counter the insurgency. The British support was restricted to battalion sized units and a Special Air Service (SAS) squadron. The squadron was augmented with a psychological operations team and a Civil Assistance Team (CAT) and was tasked to train and operate with local indigenous forces, the “firquats”, which were recruited from former PFLOAG rebels or local volunteers.<sup>15</sup>

In 1971 Operation Hornet was launched in the central region of the Jebel. In 1972 Counter-Terrorist Operations targeting PFLOAG leaders and Operation Simba, also known as “the Battle of Mirbat”, manifested the potential culmination point for the Dhofar insurgency. In 1973 an Iranian battalion sized Task Force brought a welcomed augmentation for controlling seized terrain. The 35 mile long physical barrier of the “Hornbeam Line” hampered successful rebel lines of communication to Southern Yemen after 1974. The rebels were finally defeated in a last operation in late 1975 and their supporting Southern Yemen’s regular forces withdrew from Oman’s territory.<sup>16</sup> The SAS squadron redeployed in 1976 after the military victory was turned into a political victory.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Framework Analysis of the British SOF Support to the Oman Campaign**

The overlapping strategic objective of both the British and the Sultan of Oman, in the Oman campaign was the establishment of an autonomous Sultanate of Oman. The British Government and the Sultan of Oman were both convinced that the communist inspired insurgency was a threat to the prosperity<sup>18</sup> and integrity of the Sultanate. The British influence in the Gulf region was also considered to be endangered. The reduction of PFLOAG and Southern Yemeni influence was the overlapping objective at the operational level. The alienating effect of the rebels’ communist atheism formed unity among the counterinsurgents at the tactical level. The British SOF and the host nation’s indigenous forces, the firquats, operated in accordance to these objectives. The “overlapping objectives” of the British, the Sultanate of Oman, and the

Dhofaris, produced the necessary unity of effort, which remained through the Oman campaign.

To achieve campaign objectives the British SOF campaign plan defined the 'how' and was named the "five fronts".<sup>19</sup> A "hearts and minds" approach was chosen instead of intensively conducting reprisals.<sup>20</sup> It incorporated the formation of an effective intelligence apparatus, the provision of medical treatment, the provision of veterinary assistance and agricultural development, the conduct of a psychological warfare campaign, and the training of local militia forces, the firqats. The "five fronts" campaign plan established the supporting role of British SOF.<sup>21</sup>

The lack of governmental support in the mountainous regions of the Jebel was crucial for the exploitation of the rebels' social antagonism. The integration of military and administrative action as well as the provision of health, educational and agricultural services could mitigate the hostility of the Dhofaris. "*Most often incorporate successful counterinsurgency campaigns military, conventional and unconventional, social, economic, and political measures which will vary according to the problems presented by the insurgencies*".<sup>22</sup> The British created a flexible comprehensive campaign plan which was based on overlapping objectives and was tailored to the nature of the problem, the insurgency.<sup>23</sup> However 'doing well' is not only sufficient in a counterinsurgency. The effects of the comprehensive approach have to be publicized as the counterinsurgent's success. Only then the counterinsurgent will become legitimate. Access for media representatives within the Sultanate of Oman was extremely limited. Only authorized media companies were allowed to portray a clearly prescribed image<sup>24</sup> which gave the British an informational advantage.

Analysis of the principle of decontrol will be conducted in two approaches: First assessing the "command philosophy" and second evaluating the institutional flexibility of the SOF structure in the Oman campaign. The principle of decontrol ensures that the authority for key

decisions is given to the leader on the ground. He has the intimate situational awareness. This principle also ensures, if properly conducted, an enormous flexibility for operators on the ground when facing time sensitive decisions.<sup>25</sup>

Analyzing the command philosophy the evidence of simplicity in decision preparation is described by the following illustration of events. Colonel Jeapes, a former SAS squadron commander in Dhofar and then Major, briefed within a day his superior Commander about the necessity to bring in a whole SAS Squadron, wrote a short recommendation to higher command authorities and finally received the requested augmentation a month later.<sup>26</sup> Although the overall SAS mission was extremely limited in logistical support and also faced political caveats in form of a “no casualty policy” from Whitehall the leader on the ground received remarkable freedom of maneuver from his superiors. The delegation of authority was an institutionalized principle of the British Army which ensured flexibility in mission accomplishment throughout the Oman campaign: *The tactical or organizational problems (the British Army Officer) confronts in an overseas conflict will probably be handled locally with the resources- material, human, and intellectual- he has at hand. Historical experience has taught him not to expect a flood of assistance from Britain-there is usually little to be spared- nor to look to some sacrosanct body of doctrine for advice; there was none. Instead he must make do... in short he must adapt.*<sup>27</sup>

Equally important is structural flexibility if operating “through, by and with” indigenous forces like the Firquat force in Oman. Indigenous forces’ leaders are to a large degree appealed by the luxuries of modern life like their civilian counterparts of their respective country. Privilege, social status and the “image of a powerful man” dominate their individual decision making. The visible demonstration of his force is therefore necessary in order to improve his acceptance. Besides training, equipment and logistics are equally important: modern weapons and uniforms increase the acceptance of an indigenous force leader. The British SAS dealt with this

multiple challenge of operating along tactical, operational and strategic objectives and local sometimes individual objectives of the firquat leaders with an embedded training team, called the British Army Training Team (BATT). This small size units were directly subordinated to the SAS Squadron Headquarter (HQ), which itself was a direct subordinated HQ to the Commander Sultan's Armed Forces (CSAF), a British Major General. Whitehall executed command and control directly over the CSAF, whereas the SAS squadron still remained under overall full command authority of the SAS HQ in London. The hierarchical stretch of this structure was considerably flat. Timely critical decisions were articulated and discussed in short intervals and the execution followed shortly after. The flexible integration of the BATT was also structurally integrated.

The principle of restraint is characterized by the discreet application of firepower. This may imply a greater risk to the individual operator in a MA mission; however the benefits outweigh the costs.<sup>28</sup> As pointed out before COIN is from a populations' perspective a 'choice between two alternatives'. Beneath all other objectives must the counterinsurgent operate in order to 'not antagonize the local population'. The British SAS possesses an almost institutional culture of 'precision' which is based on intensive intelligence collection and analysis and a collateral effects reducted execution. Brigadier Calvert institutionalized this principle in Malaya which later became one of the leading principles of SAS tactical innovation, e.g. the domestic counter terrorism mission.<sup>29</sup> The small unit BATT taught beneath all other individual skills individual marksmanship to their firquat patrols, which is a prerequisite for precision. This not only enhanced combat effectiveness, it reduced the firquats ability to inflict collateral damage. In addition careful planning considerations of local population behavior was consequently mitigated through psychological operations that informed either the population not to endanger themselves, or in other circumstances changed the modus operandi of time and space for a mission.<sup>30</sup>

The principle of Perseverance means that there should be an understanding that MA efforts may take a long time in order to achieve their objectives.<sup>31</sup> The British showed perseverance at the best example: the SAS was constantly deployed over a period of six years between 1970 and 1976, in which of course Northern Ireland and other international as well as domestic issues requested the integration of British SOF.<sup>32</sup> Of course “the humiliating withdrawal from southern Yemen”<sup>33</sup> in 1967 and the parallel Vietnam conflict enhanced the political pressure on political decision makers in ‘British Downing Street and Whitehall’. It created a ‘not again mentality’ amongst all political and military authorities in order to achieve victory this time in Oman.

Historically the battle of Mirbat in 1972 is described as the culmination point of the Oman campaign which was still four years before the SAS finally withdraw from Oman. It lasted in retrospect four years of civil military action to translate this kinetic victory at Mirbat into a political victory in 1976. Although finally successful it was not at all a quick decisive victory in Oman, it remained still incredibly fragile over the years between 1972 and '76. The SAS BATTs were often confronted with situations which required either kinetic or non-kinetic action, and in many instances it required both. The balanced approach of the ‘Five Fronts Campaign Plan’ never changed until the final surrender of the PFLOAG. The campaign plan was consequently carried out until political victory. The ‘training investment’ in the firquats enabled the long term success with both approaches of either combating insurgents or convincing insurgents to lay down their weapons and surrender: “*In a battle against insurgents, persuading fighters to surrender and provide information on their comrades is much more effective than killing... ”*<sup>34</sup>

The relationship between the assisting British and the assisted Omanis will be analyzed on ‘fostering legitimacy’. “*...Of all the variables that have a bearing on the progress and outcome of insurgencies, none is more important than government’s response.”*<sup>35</sup> The host nation’s

government is the primary adversary for the insurgent, which duels for population support. The host nation's government has to prove continuously that it is the better alternative, instead of the insurgents' shadow government. The British clearly recognized the social, and security, and economic shortcomings in the Dhofar region. They supported by establishing an education system, enhancing economical development, improving health services and establishing local security. The Dhofaris' population support was considered to be the "return on investment". The new sultan Qaboos proved "...that besides all matters of government's response, the matter of integrity of a host nation government is by far the most important."<sup>36</sup> An indirect role was designed for the assisting forces which has to fulfill two purposes: first, as pointed out, ensuring host nation's integrity, and second, build host nation's capacity: "*persuading the masses of the people that the government is capable of providing essential services-and of defeating the insurgents- is just as important.*"<sup>37</sup> The interagency approach was specifically created in order to enable the 'hold'<sup>38</sup> phase of the Oman campaign: After clearing rebel held territory civic action consolidated the military success.<sup>39</sup> Therefore only a minimal footprint of U.K. forces was required. British SOF 'only' because they were experts in training and mentoring. 'Through, by, and with' in training, and mentoring, and advising the Omanis characterized the British SOF operation which required capable and qualified troops to conduct the training of the firquats.<sup>40</sup> However capabilities and qualification for Military assistance are a result of SOF's discipline in training and execution. Disciplined training and execution in counterinsurgency operations enhances military success and preempts strategic consequences.<sup>41</sup> For promoting legitimacy is discipline of the supporting troops above all matters the most important.<sup>42</sup>

Besides operating as a trainer, and advisor, and mentor the British SOF was also considered to be a force enabler and multiplier. The assisting force has to fill the gap, until host nation's security forces are able to operate independently. The prolonged arm of the host nation's

government is the assisting force role. Now the contribution of all services becomes relevance. In order to enhance the operational reach of an assisted force government's joint capabilities have to be integrated. "*You cannot win the war, without the help of the population, and you cannot get the support of the population, with at least beginning to win the war.*"<sup>43</sup> However winning the war requires the use of overwhelming force. A combination of kinetic and non-kinetic force and air transport is required especially when the ground forces are limited in size. It was the combination of both kinetic and non-kinetic means which the British applied for success beyond military victory. The British approach of using both psychological operations and kinetic operations, either to win respect by "hearts and minds" or to inflict punishment if collaboration with the rebels was evident.<sup>44</sup>

### **ISAF SOF in Afghanistan**

#### **Historical Background**

ISAF was created by the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386 on 20 December, 2001. Originally the U.S. led the ISAF mission which was initially regionally limited to the Kabul area.<sup>45</sup> ISAF had "...in its pre-NATO configuration a vague but potentially competing mandate with Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and possessed virtually no resources or firepower to provide significant influence in the city of Kabul, its designated area of operations."<sup>46</sup> At the request of President Hamid Karzai the UN asked NATO to participate. In August 2003 NATO took over command and subsequently carried on the mission of its predecessor to disarm militias, train national police and military forces, reform the justice system, provide security for elections, and combat the narcotics industry. It was NATO's first out of area mission outside Europe and is still today described "as a test for the transatlantic partnership". ISAF includes troops from all NATO member states and non NATO member states such as Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Jordan, and Azerbaijan.<sup>47</sup>

NATO's mission was considered to be expandable from the beginning. Four stages were implemented in order to hand over responsibilities. The initial phasing of these stages was postponed several times due to insurgent violence and international troop contribution. In 2006 the situation in Afghanistan led to the realization among NATO allies that additional combat capability was required than previously anticipated.

Most recently a controversial discussion among NATO members questioned the overall ISAF mission focus of either Counterinsurgency oriented or Reconstruction oriented. The focus of either civic action or military action not only dominated the discussion of ISAF Mission, however it also influenced the role of SOF.<sup>48</sup> Originally initiated as a 'SOF-only-mission' OEF mandated US Special Forces supported the Afghan Northern Alliance in combating the Taliban in a UW campaign. Besides the 'classical' unconventional support, SOF conducted raids, Direct Action (DA) operations, against identified key terrorist or insurgent leaders, and special reconnaissance (SR) missions to collect strategic or operational level intelligence. Soon, after initially conducting special operations with only allied Great Britain, other NATO and non NATO allies joined the OEF mission and contributed with their national superb units. In the first half of 2002, the worlds 'who is who' of special operations was operating in Afghanistan, amongst them Germany with its relatively newly formed army special forces unit 'Kommando Spezialkräfte' (KSK). With NATO resuming sequentially responsibility for whole Afghanistan, nations recommitted or newly committed their SOF contribution under ISAF mandate. Today, almost all NATO members, and a variety of non NATO members have actively committed their special operations capabilities either temporarily or permanently to the ISAF mission.<sup>49</sup>

Germany, as mentioned earlier, provided armed forces to both ISAF and OEF missions almost since the beginning of allied and U.S. operations in Afghanistan. Historical relevance was created by former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder when he committed German armed forces under

OEF mandate into combat ground operations for the first time after the second World War. KSK operators were now operating under OEF mandate in combat operations across Afghanistan, while conventional German armed forces were conducting a reconstruction effort under ISAF mandate in Kabul.<sup>50</sup> Special reconnaissance (SR) and direct action (DA) were the KSK primary missions. Although limited in capabilities, most important SOF capable air transport, the German SOF contribution was permanently deployed in OEF until 2003. Originated by the political discussion in Germany about the future of the Afghanistan mission the OEF SOF contribution was finally peaked in 2005 when parallel German Army SOF and Navy SOF were deployed under both ISAF and OEF mandate. The political mandate for the OEF SOF contribution ended in 2008 when the necessity occurred to mandate additional combat capabilities for the ISAF mission.<sup>51</sup> Since 2006 German SOF was permanently deployed in the ISAF mission, now regionally focused on Regional Command North (RC N) area of operations.<sup>52</sup> Although the German ISAF SOF mission is an enemy centric approach of identifying and detaining insurgent key leaders, MA is conducted with selected elements of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).<sup>53</sup>

### **Framework Analysis of the ISAF SOF Mission**

The principle of overlapping objectives of the ISAF SOF mission: From a grant strategy's perspective the overlapping objectives amongst the NATO members which give the ISAF mission guidance, is 'maintaining NATO's credibility'. Additional complexity is created when non NATO members join the ISAF mission. NATO and the UN are trying to solve this challenge by separating areas of responsibility, e.g. counternarcotics – Great Britain, law enforcement training – Germany, judicial system – Italy, and regional areas of operations, e.g. Regional Command North – Germany, Regional Command West – Italy, etc. (see Appendix B). On the other hand overlapping objectives of the host nation Afghanistan are equally complex.

Dominated through cultural based tribal structures and hierarchies common objectives and interests are identified with political procedures that are by no means comparative to western NATO political processes. Germany's contribution is therefore in many ways characteristic for the overall process of identifying overlapping objectives. ISAF was from the beginning considered a reconstruction mission. German conventional forces were restricted in the application of deadly military force and limited in their operational reach. Although the German OEF SOF contribution was operating under rules of engagement which were by no means different to their international counterparts and enabled the application of military force in a broad variety. However national military authorities ensured a close supervision of German OEF SOF missions.<sup>54</sup>

The character of the ISAF mission in contrast remained for most of the time unchanged up until 2008 when it started getting obvious that the regionalized insurgency of southern Afghanistan developed into a national insurgency with a considerable insurgent violence in RC N. Committing forces for counterinsurgency operations and actively engaging insurgents was heavily discussed with other NATO allies. However Germanys "No longer should war arise from German soil"-doctrine of chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl, which opened allied resistance to German reunification, still dominated national decision making.<sup>55</sup> This doctrine began to loose its overarching dominance through the increased insurgent activity in German lead RC N and the increasing international pressure. Finally the political discussion in the aftermath of the guided air attack on September 4, 2009 led to the declaration of a non international armed conflict within Afghanistan. German forces are now operating under the law of armed conflict and are heavily engaged in combat while conducting counterinsurgency operations. However the development at the strategic level enabled the pathway for security assistance of all NATO members. It is no long a singular effort of a single nation or few nations which conduct a thorough UW/FID mission in

conjunction with their Afghan counterparts. It is the whole NATO, in which all of their member states accepted, that ‘we (NATO) cannot win the war for the Afghans on our own’. The successful counterinsurgent is a force enabler or force multiplier, who assists or trains an indigenous force. It is the moral factor of the insurgent, which can only be toppled by a local counterinsurgent. It is NATO’s responsibility to enable the Afghans to technically and tactically overwhelm the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and its affiliates. The moral contribution must remain ‘Afghan only’.

The principle of decontrol is closely connected if analyzing the German command philosophy of mission command (“Auftragstaktik”), however it unfolds structural imbalance considering German SOF structure. First mission command enabled throughout centuries German armed forces to a ‘commander’s intent oriented mission execution’ which characteristically showed flexibility at the lowest level. German SOF deployed to a combat mission first OEF mandated, later on NATO’s first out of area combat mission, faced unforeseen challenges, which unfolded shortcomings in essential capabilities. However the flexibility in adapting the mission profile enabled mission execution based on existing capabilities. It developed from stationary special reconnaissance missions at the Afghanistan/Pakistan border to mounted special reconnaissance which further developed German SOF capabilities. The weaknesses in specific capabilities led consequently to an improvement in other mutually supporting capabilities.<sup>56</sup> Second the structural imbalance is best understood considering both German national and ISAF command relationship. Operational control (OPCON) of German ISAF SOF is executed through the ISAF chain of command, which will not be analyzed in this thesis due to its classified nature.<sup>57</sup> The German SOF structure with separated responsibilities for assembling and training a SOF task force under German army authority and the separated deploying and national control and redeploying under German Joint Special Operations Command authority requires additional

attention. The responsibilities are divided through a transfer of authority procedure which clearly separates national command relationships. However it establishes additional SOF related interfaces beneath existing interfaces between Army, Navy, Air Force and the Command Joint Special Operations. Additional complexity and a potential loss of information are evident.<sup>58</sup>

The principle of Restraint is defined, as mentioned above, by the discreet application of firepower. It may imply a greater risk to the individual MA operator; however the benefits far outweigh the risks.<sup>59</sup> Concentrating on the ISAF line of operation “Enable ANSF” instilling precision of the partnering force becomes mission essential. Precision is not only limited to mission execution, i.e. marksmanship and the application of essential deadly force for special operations, precision is also required for mission preparation, i.e. intelligence collection and the post operational phase, i.e. post operational mitigation. For intelligence collection the concept of enabling indigenous forces to conduct human intelligence collection is achievable in the long term counterinsurgent success, however the full spectrum of non-kinetic means, e.g. information operations, need to be implemented in order enhance SOF effectiveness. Almost historical evidence for German SOF is the capability of precise application of military force as ‘the’ essential capability in order to convince German political decision makers to deploy SOF. The political motivation by decreasing the risk of collateral damage through a specially selected and trained capability had always political attractiveness.

The principle of perseverance is characterized by the factor time. It takes time to “Enable ANSF”. However time as mentioned above is usually short especially in the military – political interface. Enabling a host nation’s security forces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer focused on training in the tactical domains of special operations; too often historical evidence has proven that concentrating on tactics, techniques, and procedures could result in a backlash after the assisting force has long been redeployed. The Mexican Zeta cartel is a negative example of establishing a

security monopoly by creating a SOF unit while only concentrating on tactics and techniques. In order to prevent this negative development a balanced approach of security assistance is required.<sup>60</sup> Although David Kilcullen requests balance of Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economy (DIME) at the strategic level, a balance of DIME is also required at the lowest tactical level. The integrity of the particular ANSF force's leaders has to be examined and further developed. The soft parts, the incentives, of security assistance need to be focused especially in Afghanistan where host nations capabilities are due to its war torn history and underdeveloped. Payment of host nations operators and medical assistance for families and animals have to be considered as well. Tactical improvements are established in a relatively short time frame, but all other aspects as mentioned above, need additional time to be developed coherently. However besides all good innovation the 'level of ambition' for security assistance needs additional consideration. Innovation and 'good ideas' are only of long lasting effect, if the host nation's security forces are able to operate autonomously and autarkic after the assisting force has left the host nation. All innovative energies should therefore be directed at sustainable host nation's capabilities and improvements and not in duplicating a role model force of the western hemisphere.

The principle of fostering legitimacy is best described with "*Every action, every operation, every effort to assist a country faced with an insurgency must be taken only after it is deemed a means of assisting the incumbent regime to enhance its legitimacy.*"<sup>61</sup> It is therefore of imminent importance if legitimacy does not exist at the start of a campaign that it must be built over time. As mentioned in the British Oman campaign legitimacy requires besides all other qualifications discipline and integrity of the assisting force/trainer and the assisted host nations security forces. However it requires also effectiveness: effective local security forces which are able to protect the population and effective intervention forces which are able to close with the

enemy in direct combat.<sup>62</sup> In the case of German ISAF SOF this dual challenge has begun to unfold. While training of specially selected elements of ANSF is being conducted, offensive special operations are carried out in order enhance pressure on insurgent networks.<sup>63</sup> Across ISAF enabling ANSF is conducted as an ‘embedded partnering’ concept. It requires close engagement with the partner unit for long duration, often 24/7.<sup>64</sup> Embedding training teams establish trust between assisted forces personnel and assisting personnel. It ensures integrity through close supervision and enhances discipline through immediate instruction and advice. However the requirement is today even more valid, it requires also the publication of success and sometimes failure. Information operations and Public affairs operations are required at small unit level in order to enhance local success and prevent collateral damage. Especially SOF enabled ANSF require Information operations capabilities which are congruent to operational security requirements in order to inform the population about recent success in ‘winning the war’.

### **Comparison**

Comparing the principle of overlapping objectives the British were able to create the necessary unity of effort at all levels, either by exploiting the atheist nature of communism at the tactical level or the strategic relevance of the sultanate in the Gulf region. Overlapping objectives in the German ISAF contribution developed over time due to German national considerations; however the necessity remains until today to establish a strategic- operational – tactical interface because tactical objectives in Afghanistan often reflect tribal or local necessities.

The principle of decontrol proved surprisingly a common ground in analyzing the command philosophy. Both German and British established a mission command philosophy which created creativity and flexibility in mission execution, because the lack of resources was often critical, however it does not necessarily cause mission failure. The command structure of the British SOF mission was characterized best by its flat hierarchy. Interpersonal relationships

enabled quick decision making between the few relevant commanders of all levels. The ISAF mission is in contrast characterized by a complexity in structures and responsibilities, which receive additional complexity through national chain of command. In comparison this complexity establishes additional interfaces, which could lead to information loss and increase time for decision making process. As result flexibility for the commander on the ground could be decreased, which could decrease effectiveness in military assistance were a trust based relationship is created through flexible planning and execution.

The principle of restraint is in both campaigns characterized by the precise application of military effects, which include both lethal and non-lethal effects. However the British SOF proved that, although the political pressure was intense during the cold war to create success against a communist insurgency, it must not lead to decreasing the importance of training in the precise application of firepower. In comparison to the ISAF mission the political goals set should not lead to lowering standards of ANSF SOF specific training. Precision and restraint are the most powerful weapons of the counterinsurgent. Only with the precise application of military force, which requires improved targeting is the counterinsurgent able to improve the host nation's and the COIN force's legitimacy in the eyes of the population. The opponent is forced to use intimidation against his own population, which decreases his ability to hide among the population or receive support – his conspiracy is going to be endangered. The Insurgent alienates himself from the population and becomes more visible and targetable. Only than can the COIN force can outthink the insurgent.<sup>65</sup>

The principle of perseverance is rather a principle, it is more a lesson learned: It simply takes time to train indigenous forces. These prerequisite decision makers have to understand, if confronted with security assistance. “*The British had produced a textbook counterinsurgency campaign...*”<sup>66</sup> While others argue “*While Dhofar was certainly a British victory, it was a victory*

*achieved in most favorable circumstances.*<sup>67</sup> The strategic context favored the British campaign. The British fought against an insurgency that targeted an existing British influenced government, whereas in Afghanistan the insurgency targets a government that first had to be established and now develops its legitimacy. The communist atheism and the Sultan's restrictive Media campaign contributed in achieving the strategic objective. However the 1970's British Oman Campaign, although extremely limited in forces, took almost six years to create a political victory. The British SAS was during that time although in varying numbers permanently deployed to Oman. The German ISAF SOF mission is now almost equally time intensive although the insurgents culmination point is considered to be achieved during the winter 2010/2011.<sup>68</sup> Additional time will be required to achieve the military and political objectives.

The principle of fostering legitimacy is among all principles the most important. However fostering legitimacy is considered to be the most complex principle to be achieved. The British created legitimacy by building it. The firquats received additional training and support in order to become a legitimate force. The advantage of "small numbers" in a counterinsurgency is besides precision and restraint SOF's greatest advantage. It prevents the host nation's population from getting antagonized by a large 'foreign force'. SOF's small numbers and their inherent capability to operate as force enablers and multiplier in multiple ways creates their specific strategic utility in counterinsurgency, when discretion is most necessary. Creating legitimacy also prevents an assisting government from establishing a security monopoly within a host nation. Besides tactics, techniques, and procedures the integrity of the personnel in that particular force has to be developed as well. This is of utmost importance if considering training of ANSF. The local and tribal context in Afghanistan often prevents a loyalty to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Integrity and loyalty has to be developed carefully by the assisting force. This is in the establishment of a small unit only achievable with a bottom up approach. In creating unit

cohesion and unit integrity a more holistic approach of security assistance has to be established. The lack of integrity and loyalty has to be outweighed with unit cohesion in the beginning, while simultaneously developing integrity and loyalty in the long perspective.

### **Conclusion**

The British conducted a nearly perfect example of an ‘economy of force’ campaign in Oman. It focused on the essential improvements within the Sultanate of Oman in general and the Dhofar province in particular. The integration of SOF enabled the success by training a security force, while permanently functioning as a force enabler and multiplier. This helped to reduce forces involved and kept media attention remarkably low. It created a situation which was highly preferable for political decision makers.

Germany’s SOF missions, both OEF and ISAF mandated, were of considerable public and political interest and discussion. Additional transparency was often requested by all political parties. However transparency and operational security are conflicting interests, if considering Special Operations. The structural deficits of German SOF, as shown in Noetzel, et al., are potential originators for a lack of transparency. The variety of interfaces between the services and joint commands, not only reduce the flexibility of tactical commanders on the ground, the informational loss also reduces transparency of decisions and actions. Military assistance, as pointed out in this thesis, requires enhanced flexibility through the close integration of assisting forces and indigenous forces. The recent “force-restructuring” discussion in Germany should therefore integrate a modification of the German SOF structure and integration within the Armed Forces.

<sup>1</sup> A German Turkish citizen male was captured early after 9/11 at the Pakistan/Afghanistan Border. Subsequently German Special Operations Forces were involved in his detainment in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Later after an imprisonment in Guantanamo Bay Kurnaz was released and immediately claimed the German officials of contribution to inhumane treatment. His accusations included also operators of German SOF, who were operating out of Kandahar at this time in the OEF campaign. Noetzel, Timo, Schreer, Benjamin, German Special Operations Forces, p.1

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A. The ‘Dhofar’ describes the Omani province, which was the area of operation for the British SOF campaign. Tony Jeapes, SAS Operation Oman, p.11

<sup>3</sup> Stevens Basilici. Jeremy Simmons. Transformation: A Bold Case for Unconventional Warfare. p. 56

<sup>4</sup> E.G. the Mexican drug cartels and the Zeta organization, which is comprised of former Mexican SOF personnel which could be considered as a “security monopoly” because of the overwhelming tactical capabilities in mission planning and execution. John B. Alexander, Convergence: Special Operations Forces and Civilian Law Enforcement, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Basilici et al., p. 57

<sup>6</sup> Basilici et al., p. 58

<sup>7</sup> Integrity is defined as the association with honesty, completeness, and incorruptibility, O'Neill, p. 153

<sup>8</sup> John Nagl, Eating Soup with a Knife, p.76

<sup>9</sup> Map of Oman and Dhofar: see Appendix A

<sup>10</sup> To give a brief illustration about Oman in the 1970s: The population of the Dhofar region estimated between 30 and 50.000, the infant mortality peaked at 75 %, and literacy rate was 5 %, Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, p.132

<sup>11</sup> In 1958 British forces, in support of the Sultanate of Oman’s Armed Forces, successfully defeated a rebellion in the heartland of Oman, called the Jebel Akhdar, Newsinger, p.130.

<sup>12</sup> Newsinger, p.140

<sup>13</sup> In this thesis the definition PFLOAG and rebels are used in equal understanding as “the rebels of the People’s Front for the Liberation Of the Arabian Gulf”.

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<sup>14</sup> In 1970 the PFLOAG was roughly in control of two thirds of Dhofar, Newsinger, p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> To give a brief technical overview of the British air transport and fighter support: Fixed Wing: 8 Strikemaster Jets for Close Air support, 2 SkyVan and Britten Norman Islanders for Air Transport; Rotary Wing: Bell Augusta 205A ( License Copy of HUEY Bell), AB 206 Jet Ranger, Akehurst, p. 22

<sup>16</sup> Regular forces of the People's Republic of Southern Yemen reinforced the PFLOAG, Newsinger, p. 150

<sup>17</sup> Akehurst, p. 173

<sup>18</sup> Later prosperity was expected through the anticipated oil revenues.

<sup>19</sup> The tactical synonym for "the five lines of Operation", Newsinger, p. 142

<sup>20</sup> Although the British forces conducted operations, in order to „educate“ the population: cooperation with the rebels was punished by military force. "By bombing and shelling the liberated areas the British forced the population to move out and flee to safer areas", Newsinger, p.145

<sup>21</sup> David Kilcullen, Accidental Guerilla , p.110.

<sup>22</sup> O'Neill, p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> The author defines „comprehensive“ as the approach which incorporates all interagency functions: Diplomacy, Informational, Military, and Economics.

<sup>24</sup> John Akehurst, We Won A War, p. 180

<sup>25</sup> Basilici et al., p.90

<sup>26</sup> Jeapes, p. 47

<sup>27</sup> Nagl, p. 194

<sup>28</sup> Basilici, et al., p. 91

<sup>29</sup> Nagl, p.195

<sup>30</sup> Jeapes, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> Basilici, et al., p. 91

<sup>32</sup> Newsinger, p. 142

<sup>33</sup> Newsinger, p. 130

<sup>34</sup> O'Neill, p. 125

<sup>35</sup> O'Neill, p. 125

<sup>36</sup> Newsinger, p. 135

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<sup>37</sup> Nagl, p. 93

<sup>38</sup> The ‘hold Phase’ is phase three in counterinsurgency campaign (shape, clear, hold, and build).

<sup>39</sup> Civic Action are medical, veterinary, economical, and agricultural projects that started immediately after military maneuver. Newsinger, p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> This is also the lead slogan for Unconventional Warfare conducted by U.S. Special Forces. Hy Rothstein, Unconventional Warfare, p. 20

<sup>41</sup> In reference to the strategic corporal and media scandals.

<sup>42</sup> O'Neill, p. 152

<sup>43</sup> Nagl, p. 76

<sup>44</sup> Propaganda in reference to the British in the Oman, Nagl, p. 76

<sup>45</sup> Morelli, Vincent, and Belkin, Paul, NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance, p.11

<sup>46</sup> Marston, Daniel, Lessons in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Counterinsurgency, Afghanistan 2001-07, p. 223

<sup>47</sup> <sup>47</sup> Morelli, et al., pp. 1

<sup>48</sup> Morelli, et al., p. 13

<sup>49</sup> Noetzel, et al., pp. 8

<sup>50</sup> Noetzel, et al., p. 14

<sup>51</sup> Morelli, et al., p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Noetzel, et al. p.14

<sup>53</sup> The German Ministry of Defense answer of a ‘small inquiry’ to members of the German Bundestag. Michael Schmidt, Die Zeit: Zeit Online, p. 1

<sup>54</sup> Morelli, et al., p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> James D. Bindenagel, Afghanistan: The German Factor, p.101. In: PRISM, Volume 1, No. 4, 09/2010

<sup>56</sup> Noetzel, et al., p. 15

<sup>57</sup> The German Ministry of Defense answer of a ‘small inquiry’ to members of the German Bundestag. Schmidt, p. 3

<sup>58</sup> Noetzel, et al., p. 21

<sup>59</sup> Basilici, et al., p.61

<sup>60</sup> Kilcullen, p. 14

<sup>61</sup> Basilici, et al., p. 93

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<sup>62</sup> Kilcullen, p. 267

<sup>63</sup> Noetzel, et al., pp. 21

<sup>64</sup> Commander ISAF, Partnering directive, p. 2. In: 3.b. Embedded Partnerships builds relationships: Embedded partnership is not a long distance relationship. ANSF and ISAF units will no longer operate from separate FOBs. Instead, they will live and operate from the same FOB and integrate their headquarters,...

<sup>65</sup> Schafer, Mark. Fussell, Chris. The Role of SOF Direct Action in Counterinsurgency, p. 89

<sup>66</sup> Quotation of General Sir Richard De La Billiere (UK), in: O'Neill, p.150,

<sup>67</sup> O'Neill, p. 150

<sup>68</sup> German Commander RC North, Major General Fritz, in an interview on the Bundeswehr homepage:  
[http://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/!ut/p/c4/NYvBCsJADET\\_KOkKUvFmWQ9eBbH1lraxBNrdshstiB9v9uAMzGHmDT7QHOgtE6nEQDO22A1y7Dfot5GBJWRi\\_TAskrMRHEAyPfFejgYMVmIJ5aBiOSXSmGCNSeeyvFKyBWTErnK-cXX11\\_sezt7f2nq395fmiuuynH741KFm/](http://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/!ut/p/c4/NYvBCsJADET_KOkKUvFmWQ9eBbH1lraxBNrdshstiB9v9uAMzGHmDT7QHOgtE6nEQDO22A1y7Dfot5GBJWRi_TAskrMRHEAyPfFejgYMVmIJ5aBiOSXSmGCNSeeyvFKyBWTErnK-cXX11_sezt7f2nq395fmiuuynH741KFm/).

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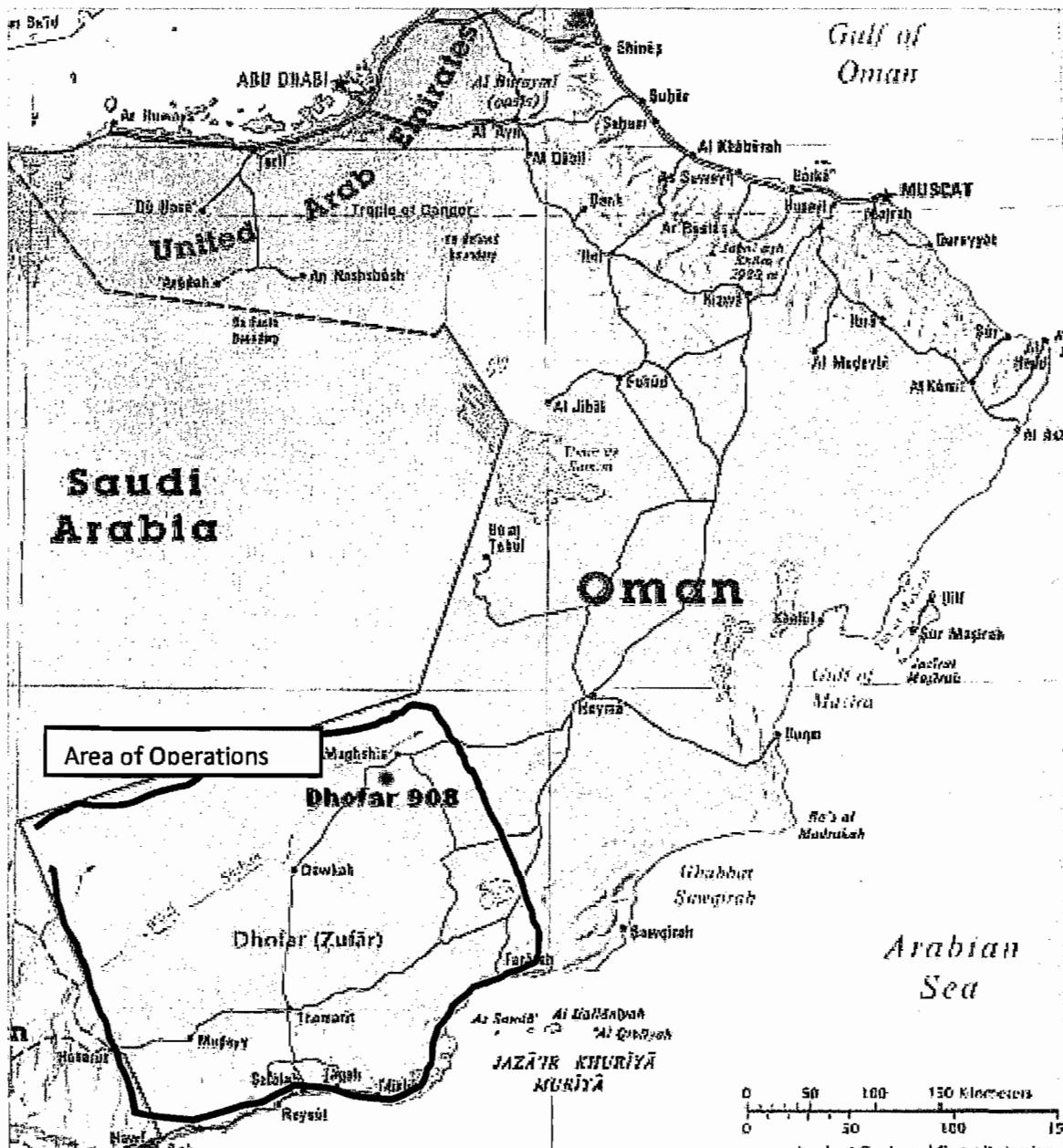
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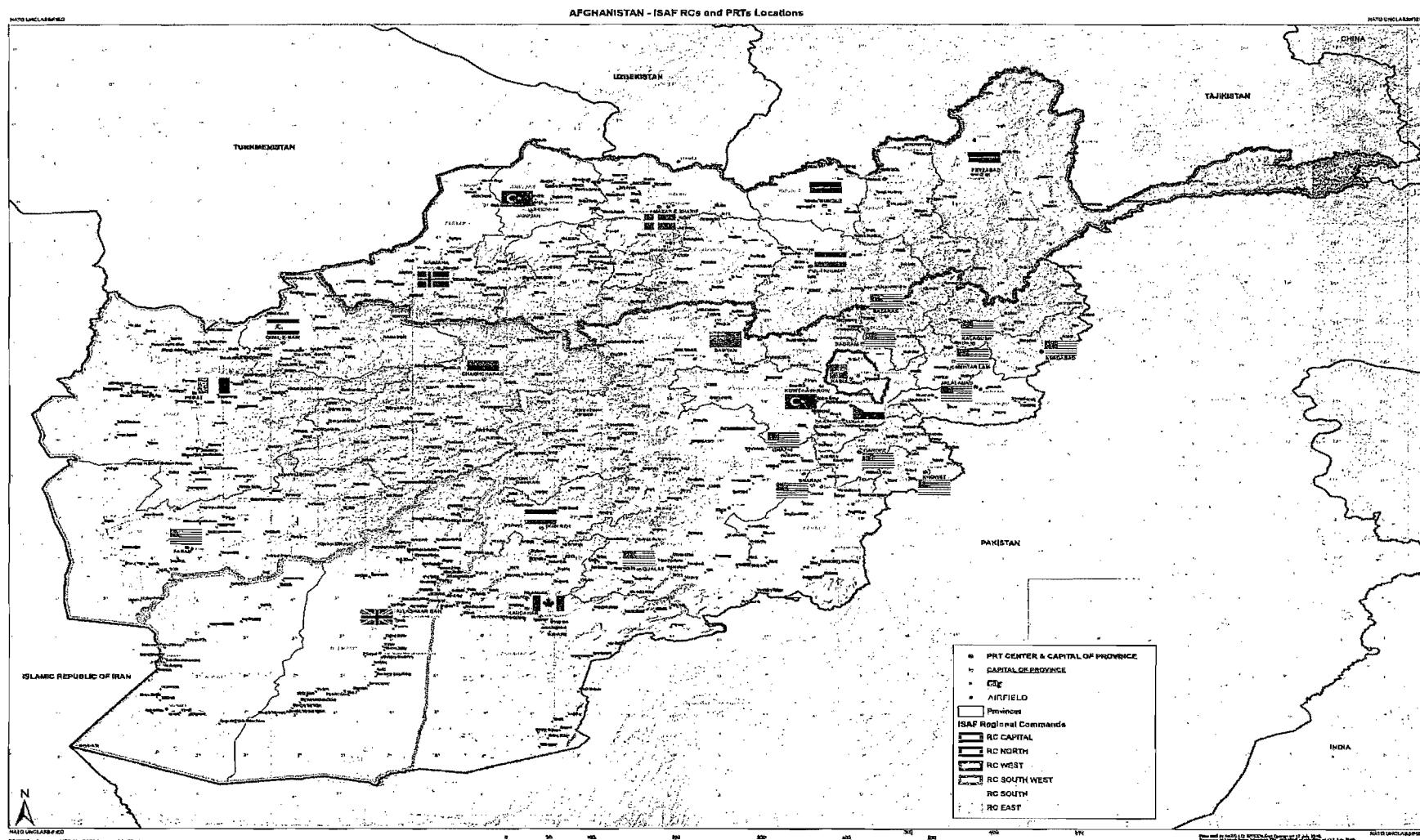
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## Appendix A: British Oman Campaign Area of Operations



Source: [http://www.meteoritestudies.com/oman\\_map.jpg](http://www.meteoritestudies.com/oman_map.jpg)

## Appendix B: ISAF Mission in Afghanistan



Source: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/maps/map3.jpg>